United Nations A/63/367

General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 September 2008

Original: English

**Sixty-third session**
Agenda item 64 (b)
**Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms**

# Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa

## Report of the Secretary-General*

*Summary*

The present report, submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 62/221, provides an overview of the work carried out by the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa and the most significant developments in its operations from September 2007 to August 2008. It provides details on activities carried out in the areas of capacity-building of Governments and civil society organizations in the region, technical cooperation and advisory activities, democracy, peace and security support, public information and dissemination of documentation, commemorative activities, including those relating to the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the strengthening of partnerships with Governments, subregional organizations, civil society organizations and United Nations agencies.

* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect recent developments.

08-51298 (E) 221008

# Contents


| | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| I. | Introduction | 3 |
| II. | Human rights and peace and security | 3 |
| III. | Activities carried out from September 2007 to August 2008 | 5 |
| | A. Human rights activities | 5 |
| | B. Democracy and rule-of-law activities | 8 |
| | C. Advisory services and technical cooperation | 8 |
| | D. Promotion of peace and security in Central Africa | 9 |
| | E. Internship programme | 10 |
| | F. Information, sensitization and documentation | 10 |
| IV. | Development of partnerships | 11 |
| | A. Collaboration with regional organizations | 11 |
| | B. Collaboration with the diplomatic community, donors and civil society organizations | 12 |
| | C. Collaboration with United Nations agencies | 13 |
| V. | Conclusions and recommendations | 14 |

# I. Introduction

1. The Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa was established in 2001 at the request of the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), pursuant to the resolution adopted by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa at its fourth meeting, in April 1994 in Yaoundé, as well as General Assembly resolutions 53/78 A and 54/55 A. Its mandate is to contribute to capacity-building in the area of promotion and protection of human rights, to support the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions and to assist in the dissemination of and sensitization to international human rights instruments. The Centre is also mandated to promote democracy and the rule of law throughout the subregion and to work towards the prevention of conflicts and the promotion of sustainable peace and development.

2. The Centre operates under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the High Commissioner officially inaugurated the Centre in June 2002. It is currently staffed with a Director, a Regional Adviser for Democracy, one Human Rights Officer, a National Programme Officer in charge of the library and databases, and four assistant-level local staff (two were recruited after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 62/221).

3. In response to the request of the General Assembly contained in its resolution 62/221, an additional amount of $520,100, consisting of (a) $381,100 under post resources for the establishment of two new posts (one P-3 and one Local level) and the conversion of three Local level and one National Officer posts; and (b) non-post resources of $139,000, was approved by the Assembly to be accommodated within the resources provided under Section 23, Human Rights, of the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009. The total resources approved for the Centre under section 23, Human Rights, of the programme budget for the bienniun 2008-2009 amounts to 9 posts (4 Professional, 1 National Officer and 4 Local level) and $584,500 in non-post resources. In addition, the Centre is supported by extrabudgetary resources of approximately $365,000 and two associate experts. The recruitment of two international Professional staff is currently being finalized.

# II. Human rights and peace and security

4. Since the Centre's establishment, States of the subregion have become more aware of human rights. They have increased their engagement in the promotion of human rights and enhanced collaboration with OHCHR. Further, civil society organizations' work, which is supported by OHCHR, added to this positive development. Most of the States of the subregion have ratified the core international human rights instruments, are in the process of doing so or have declared their intention to do so. Most of the Governments of the subregion have created human rights departments or ministries, as well as national human rights institutions,[1]

[1] The national human rights institutions were established to differing degrees of conformity with the Paris Principles related to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights.

which, however, generally concentrate more on promotion and sensitization programmes than on monitoring and protection of human rights.

5. The justice systems and the prison administration have only recently received more attention from the countries of the subregion. Nonetheless, they generally suffer from insufficient budget allocation, lack of qualified personnel, and inadequate premises and equipment, which in most cases leads to a considerable backlog of lawsuits. Delivery of justice is often not exempt from undue intervention by executive powers, and some national legislation still needs to be adapted to international standards. Some initial signs of progress have been observed, for example, Cameroon adopted a new code of penal procedure in 2007, which has been widely welcomed as respectful of human rights, and in September 2007 the Government of Gabon officially abolished the death penalty, which it had not practised for the past 20 years.

6. Prison conditions, which are frequently characterized by severe overcrowding and life-threatening conditions, are also a matter of concern. Allegations of ill-treatment of detainees, as well as cases of deaths in custody as a consequence of the excessive use of force or use of firearms, have been received. To remedy this situation, States of the subregion have declared their intention to invest in new prisons, to be administered according to international standards. They have also taken steps to update their penal legislation so as to include forms of redress other than imprisonment or fines. Some countries have also sought the technical support of the Centre in bringing their legislation pertaining to the administration of justice into compliance with international human rights standards. Such efforts are and will continue to be supported by the Centre and disseminated in the subregion.

7. The general level of conflict situations has continued to decline in the subregion, with the exception of Chad. In the Central African Republic, on 26 June 2008 the rebel movements concluded a comprehensive peace agreement; however the Centre is concerned about the provision that includes amnesty for war-related crimes. In Burundi, the leader of the armed opposition movement (FNL-Palipehutu) signed a peace agreement on 26 May 2008. Continuous efforts are being made to encourage local militia groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to disarm and peacefully reintegrate into society. In the triangle of the larger areas adjacent to the borders between Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic, widespread banditry is the major cause of mass displacement, particularly in the Central African Republic. The 14 August 2008 return of the Bakassi peninsula and adjacent island zones to the sovereignty of Cameroon is being closely observed by the Centre, as groups of local inhabitants are opposing the decision of the International Court of Justice and the area has become a hideout for traffickers, rebels and bandits during the interim period.

8. While in some States responsible critical expression by the media is largely tolerated, in others it is not. In some countries of the subregion, journalists have been subjected to arrest, and print publications and broadcasting stations have been closed down, at least temporarily, limiting pluralistic, public debate, which is essential to democracy and progress. Such constraints were often imposed on the basis of a narrow interpretation of legislation on defamation. Similarly, the space in which civil society organizations operate differs from country to country, although their important social role is now widely recognized and they are able to operate and express their views publicly.

9. Local and legislative elections have taken place in Cameroon, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. In general, voter turnout was very low, and problems regarding the timely delivery of voter registration cards, the independence of the election commissions and the general lack of transparency were reported. Moreover, the establishment of an effectively independent, credible election commission remains a challenge in all countries of the subregion.

10. Discrimination in all its forms deserves particular attention from government as well as civil society. Although all Governments of the subregion have ministries for women's empowerment, much remains to be done to efficiently address issues of gender equality. Discriminatory laws have in many instances been identified and steps are being taken by Governments to review their legislation and ensure compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Implementation of the principles of equality, however, remains a major challenge, particularly regarding women's rights, the rights of people living with disabilities and indigenous peoples. Traditional cultural practices can sometimes be prejudicial to women's rights and need to be addressed through public debate, legislation and monitoring. Violence against women is also a recurrent phenomenon that needs proper attention from Governments, civil society and communities, through legislative and repressive measures as well as through public awareness campaigns. Discrimination against indigenous peoples, such as the Pygmies, Mbororo, the Khoisan in southern Angola and the Batwa in Rwanda, has been understood by several Governments of the subregion as an issue to be urgently addressed. Yet few specific measures have been taken to improve their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to access to land, health, education and clean water.

11. Migration caused by conflict and by economic hardship, remains a matter of serious concern in the subregion, as does trafficking of human beings, including child trafficking. Lucrative trafficking activities originating in West Africa are moving into the subregion. The Centre, in collaboration with ECCAS, will address this issue in a workshop in which representatives of West African States have expressed interest in participating. Furthermore, in some countries of the subregion, illegal migrant workers have been exposed to inhumane treatment, and the Centre has received allegations of deadly incidents during arrest, detention or expulsion by authorities. Several Governments of the subregion have expressed their readiness to engage in a serious fight against such practices and to develop regional policies that could help address the issue globally, including improved control of borders, enhanced police cooperation, including with INTERPOL, a public information campaign and better identification and protection of victims.

# III. Activities carried out from September 2007 to August 2008

## A. Human rights activities

12. In its three-year strategy for the period 2007-2009, the Centre focuses on countries where OHCHR does not have a presence and where the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has not set up a peace operation with a human rights component. Given its resources, until 2009 the Centre will focus its activities on Cameroon, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe.

Nonetheless, all countries of Central Africa are addressed in the Centre's activities regarding capacity-building, sensitization programmes, particularly on transitional justice, peace and security, human trafficking and other subregional issues.

13. In February 2008, subsequent to the violent demonstrations against the increase in fuel prices and the cost of living in various areas of Cameroon, Centre staff met with government and civil society representatives, journalists and lawyers in order to get an understanding of the underlying causes of the protests and the handling of the outbreak of violence by the authorities. On the basis of those meetings and the meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Centre will discuss with the Government later this year how to support different government entities, particularly security forces, in respecting human rights standards when responding to violent riots.

14. Women's rights, women's empowerment, violence against women and gender-based discrimination continued to be high on the Centre's 2007-2008 agenda. On 27 November 2007, during the week marking the celebration of the twelfth International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Centre organized, under the patronage of Cameroon's Minister of Women's Empowerment, training and discussion sessions on empowering widows and orphans in the exercise of their specific rights. The Centre also actively supported a project of the association Women in Alternative Action (WAA) aimed at reviewing discriminatory clauses of Cameroonian legislation that contravene the 1996 Constitution and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. On 18 January 2008, the Centre hosted and participated in a discussion organized by WAA with the objective of establishing a list of such laws and of proposing amendments that would then be submitted to the parliament for consideration and action. Through training sessions and seminars supported by the Centre's outreach and information materials, WAA encourages women to create their own sources of revenue and sensitizes women and girls to HIV/AIDS issues. Gender and human rights was also the subject of a two-day training event for trainers from the Ministry of Family, Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Women Affairs, as well as journalists, organized by the Centre in the Congo in November 2007. The participants agreed to be responsible for training other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil servants to include gender and human rights perspectives in their programming and to develop a campaign on violence against women in collaboration with the "Programme d'appui à l'émergence et au développement" project of the European Union. In June 2008, during a mission of the Centre to Brazzaville, eight participants from the ministries who had received training in November 2007 acted as trainers for staff of their respective ministries on the rights of women, gender-based discrimination and gender equality. That training programme is to be followed by several training sessions on the same issues, particularly in the provinces of the Congo.

15. On 20 November 2007, on the occasion of the eighteenth International Children's Day, the Centre organized an open-door day for 50 high-school students, who learned about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and entered into discussions on their rights. On 11 April 2008, child trafficking and child labour were the themes of a workshop jointly organized by the Centre and the African Women's Association of Cameroon. The Centre made a presentation on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, its second Optional Protocol and the Palermo Protocol, and on the United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women

and children. Throughout the year, the Centre continued to raise the issue of children's rights with the relevant ministries of Cameroon, the Congo and Gabon. The Centre has, moreover, regularly advised ministries and civil society members in the region on human rights standards and the obligation of States to promote and protect child rights. In October 2008, the Centre plans to hold a regional consultation in Gabon to support countries of the subregion in furthering child rights and in starting a public debate on actions to be taken to improve the current situation.

16. Following a complaint to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people by a group of residents of the Mezam Department (north-west Cameroon) alleging that their right to choose their own traditional leader had been violated when a chief from the State administration was imposed, a team from the Centre visited the area, met the local authorities and advised them to make sure that the rights of both communities were respected in addressing issues of traditional and local governance, as well as land issues. The Centre works with indigenous groups to enhance their capacity to deal with such problems. To that end, the Centre manages a subregional network of indigenous peoples who regularly exchange information and ideas. In March 2008, the Centre started an Internet information network for indigenous peoples and minorities from Central Africa. More than 100 individuals, mainly indigenous leaders from Central Africa and other countries, are on the mailing list and receive and exchange information on a regular basis on indigenous and minority issues in the subregion (e.g., indigenous fellowships at OHCHR, local NGO initiatives for the promotion of indigenous rights, invitations to seminars, sharing of documentation).

17. Following the celebration of the sixteenth International Day of Persons with Disabilities, on 3 December 2007, the Cameroonian Ministry of Social Affairs set up an inter-ministerial preparatory committee with five subcommissions, in which the Centre actively participated. The commissions examined questions relating to the legal framework, social and economic reintegration, health, education, public information and infrastructure.

18. Human rights education being one of the most consistent ways to promote a culture of human rights, in May 2008 the Centre joined the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to organize a seminar attended by 15 education professionals from five African countries, including Cameroon and Chad, on the introduction of human rights education in primary and secondary schools. The participants formulated several recommendations, including the integration of human rights education into national policies and legislation, the dissemination of the United Nations action plan on human rights education and the enhancement of the effectiveness of human rights education in primary and secondary schools.

19. Since September 2007, the Centre has conducted over 10 training sessions for Cameroonian police and gendarmerie officers. Furthermore, the Awae Centre de perfectionnement aux techniques de maintien de l'ordre requested the support of the Centre to include human rights training sessions in its courses for police officers from countries of ECCAS, including some who were preparing to be deployed to peace missions. During the training, emphasis was put on human rights during inquiry, arrest and detention. Moreover, in April 2008, the Centre and the Cameroon

Association of Human Rights, Democracy and Peace organized a seminar on the rights of people in detention for Cameroonian police and civil society organizations.

## B. Democracy and rule-of-law activities

20. As several countries of the subregion are going through transitional processes, the Centre invited experienced civil society representatives to a workshop on transitional justice in June 2007. Follow-up training funded by the Swiss Government was implemented in May 2008 to deepen their substantive knowledge and develop their training skills. At the initiative of the Centre, the group created a regional network on transitional justice to share information, reference documents and training materials. The network is managed by the Centre and is currently very active in terms of discussion, experience and information-sharing. For example, the members of the network in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo worked together closely following the 24 May 2008 arrest of Jean-Pierre Bemba on an International Criminal Court arrest warrant.

21. In October 2007, the Centre hosted an international forum on democracy in Africa, which was jointly organized by Cameroon Solutions, a national platform of NGOs working on human rights and democracy, and was attended by 50 delegates from Central, Southern, West and North Africa. The forum was aimed at assessing democratic practices in Africa from the 1990s. For three days, panellists from universities, Governments and civil society discussed a range of topics, such as democracy and development, democratic transitions in post-conflict periods, free and fair electoral systems and support for democracy by the international community.

22. In December 2007, the Centre organized a consultation with NGOs from the Central African Republic and Chad on their perspectives on the conflict situation and their views on how they could assist in re-establishing the dialogue between the different groups through capacity-building exercises related to conflict resolution, mediation and peacebuilding. That meeting led the Centre to increase its number and level of contacts in both the Central African Republic and Chad and to develop a network of dedicated individuals that would be the Centre's focal points for conveying documentation and outreach materials related to human rights and democracy to communities.

23. The Centre manages the joint OHCHR/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "Assisting community together" programme, which is aimed at increasing democracy and human rights awareness among NGO stakeholders in Cameroon. There are six NGOs benefiting from this project, which has come to the end of its fifth phase; Cameroon has been selected for the sixth phase. The role of the Centre is to advise NGOs and support the building of their capacities to develop human rights education programmes and to integrate human rights-based approaches into their projects.

## C. Advisory services and technical cooperation

24. In August 2007, the Centre held a day of consultations with officials from six Cameroonian ministries, including the Prime Minister's Office, and the National

Commission of Human Rights and Freedoms. The meeting enabled them to identify avenues of collaboration on human rights and democracy issues in Cameroon.

25. In October 2007, the Centre organized a five-day training workshop attended by 18 Government officials from Cameroon, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon on reporting to treaty bodies and following up their recommendations, as well as the work of special procedures. Until 2009, the Centre plans to carry out activities in each of the four countries to follow up that training.

26. The Centre extended its advisory services to the Cameroonian National Commission of Human Rights and Freedoms. On 18 October 2007, the Centre hosted a one-day training session for the Commission's newly appointed focal points in the different ministries and Commission members on human rights monitoring within their respective areas of competence. The Centre furthermore contributed advice on the development of the Commission's nationwide capacity-building project on human rights, implemented in cooperation with UNDP.

27. Promoted by the Centre and endorsed by the Government in 2006, the Cameroon National Human Rights Action Plan continued to be drafted by a steering committee composed of experts from the National Commission of Human Rights and Freedoms, the Government, academics and civil society with technical assistance from the Centre. Starting with an analysis of the social, economic, political, legal, cultural and institutional context of the country, the plan comprises five major sections on civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, rights related to human security, the rights of the most vulnerable groups and the mechanisms of adoption, implementation and evaluation. On 17 and 18 June 2008, during a validation workshop, the Centre made a series of suggestions related to protection of human rights in cases of natural disaster, conflict and the rights of refugees, migrant workers and persons deprived of their liberty, as well as budget allocations and the establishment of baseline data. The final draft of the National Human Rights Action Plan will be submitted to the Government and the parliament for adoption in the form of a law.

28. During a mission to the Congo, from 2 to 18 February 2008, the Centre held meetings with the Minister of Professional and Technical Education, the President of the Congolese National Assembly, the National Human Rights Commission, the Minister in charge of security and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Integration of Women into Development Actions. The mission had as its objectives the support of the national human rights plan, which includes the creation of a national body to monitor the rights of the child, the gathering of disaggregated data on children's issues and support for reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It was also aimed at enhancing the National Human Rights Commission and at building the capacity of government officials and journalists on discrimination and gender issues.

## D. Promotion of peace and security in Central Africa

29. Together with other heads of United Nations agencies, the Centre took part in a meeting of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa on 26 May 2008. The meeting examined the process of the delimitation of the border between Cameroon and Nigeria, including the return of the Bakassi peninsula to

Cameroonian sovereignty, on 14 August 2008, and focused on specific issues such as security and the consequences for the local population affected by that change of sovereignty. The Centre emphasized that human rights needed to be mainstreamed and respected in the course of that process and its aftermath, and it offered to provide advice and technical support.

## E. Internship programme

30. The Centre further developed its internship programme for graduate students, government representatives, civil servants and civil society members. The Centre invited 12 interns from the region who had been contributing to its substantive and administrative work. Interns included human rights students, security forces officers, teachers, administrators and information technology specialists. They were all exposed to human rights issues and worked for a minimum of two and a maximum of six months. They came from Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad. Because of the Centre's location, the demand is high in Cameroon, and the Centre continues to encourage other countries of the subregion to submit applications for qualified interns.

## F. Information, sensitization, and documentation

31. Providing information on human rights and on the work of the Centre to Governments, civil society networks and the public in general is an essential part of the Centre's strategy. Therefore, the Centre continued to invite civil society organizations, students and the interested public to informative debates, conferences and special days on various human rights and democracy subjects, such as racial discrimination, the right to clean water, United Nations peace operations or commemorations of international days. The Centre maintains and regularly updates its website, which contains broad information on the Centre, its activities and its resources, as well as OHCHR activities and other related human rights and democracy debates, reports and trends. The website has received an average of 500 visitors per week since its inception in March 2007. The Centre has recently developed discussion forums on human rights and democracy.

32. The Centre collects a weekly selection of press clippings from the subregional and international press and shares them with a list of approximately 4,500 contacts from the subregion and beyond. It also ensures information flows among its four main networks (on indigenous peoples, media, transitional justice and gender-based discrimination) and other less formal groups established in the framework of the implementation of its strategy.

33. The Centre maintains a small reference library. During the period under review, 1,700 visitors consulted human rights and democracy documents, accessed human rights websites, sought the advice of the Centre on issues related to their studies or raised questions in relation to their own knowledge or concerns about human rights and democracy.

34. The celebrations of the fifty-ninth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the launch of the year-long awareness campaign in relation to its sixtieth anniversary were, as every year, a prominent occasion to draw the attention of key decision makers, development cooperation partners, civil

society, students and the general public to universal human rights. On 7 December 2007, the Centre organized an open-door day for 120 students from various schools in celebration of the Universal Declaration. On 10 December, the Centre and 200 Government officials and stakeholders (diplomatic missions, heads of United Nations agencies, civil society representatives and journalists) participated in an official ceremony in which Cameroonian artists presented a painting exhibition on the themes of torture, migration and violence against women. Promotional materials, including booklets containing the Universal Declaration, calendars, posters, stickers and T-shirts, were distributed to support the Centre's public information and awareness plan, which also included participation in private and public media through articles, interviews and broadcast programmes. A conference on the theme "Universality of human rights: dignity and justice for all", attended by university students, academics and civil society leaders, concluded the celebrations. On 16 July 2008, in the framework of the celebrations of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, the Centre coordinated a conference and debate on the eradication of torture in detention centres, conducted jointly with the Ministry of Justice, two Cameroonian NGOs (Action chrétienne contre la torture and Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture) and the British High Commissioner in Cameroon, and with the contribution of the National Commission of Human Rights and Freedom of Cameroon.

35. Regular contacts with the media helped the Centre to remain high on the public agenda. Part of the Centre's strategy is to provide journalists with the knowledge and tools to include a human rights perspective in their daily work, to support public human rights education programmes and to keep the public informed on human rights issues. The Centre organized training workshops on gender-based violence for journalists in Gabon, Cameroon, and the Congo in July 2007, February 2008 and June 2008, respectively, and convened another workshop on the use of the human rights-based approach to journalism with a group of 25 Cameroonian journalists from private and State print and audio-visual media in July 2008. In addition, the Centre held a three-day workshop on national legislation on journalism, press freedom, the protection of journalists and the issues of professional ethics, deontology and defamation, in Bangui.

# IV. Development of partnerships

## A. Collaboration with regional organizations

36. On 12 and 13 November 2007, an expert meeting on indigenous peoples' rights and the implementation of the Second International Decade of the Worlds' Indigenous People took place in Brazzaville, organized by OHCHR and the Centre in collaboration with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee and the Department for Political Affairs of the African Union were also among the organizers. Indigenous representatives from all African regions participated in an exchange of views and experience on the implementation of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People in Africa and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The meeting discussed best-practice models, identified challenges and

elaborated recommendations, including on the creation of a network, later created and managed by the Centre as described in paragraph 16 above.

37. The Centre participated in the ninth ECCAS summit, held in Yaoundé on 24 and 25 June 2008. The summit took stock of the number of obstacles slowing down the regional integration process and adopted several decisions to advance the development of common Community institutions. An ECCAS parliament is now scheduled to be set up in 2009, a common passport allowing free circulation within the Community is to be introduced on 1 January 2010 and preparatory work on the projected common airline to improve intra-Community links is to be sped up. The Centre was able to start discussions with the newly created Human Rights Committee of ECCAS, with which it intends to develop joint programmes on human trafficking, small arms circulation and general human rights issues.

38. In November 2007, representatives of the Centre attended the forty-second ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Brazzaville. On that occasion, it organized group discussions and a training programme for NGOs on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

39. The relationship between the Centre and ECCAS, which is formalized in a memorandum of understanding is currently being strengthened by the preparation of a joint child-trafficking conference aimed at giving more visibility to the issue, enhancing cooperation among States and developing effective joint programmes.

## B. Collaboration with the diplomatic community, donors and civil society organizations

40. The Centre has developed strong ties of cooperation with civil society organizations in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, and especially with Cameroon, which is favoured by the fact that the Centre is based there, and also by the very active involvement of its ministries in the Centre's work. The Centre has invested in building the capacity of civil society and private institutions, which it is doing side by side with mid-level government actors to ensure the development of a relationship and improved understanding between the two groups and enhance cooperation, particularly with regard to treaty body reporting and in preparation for the upcoming universal periodic review.[2] More than 100 NGOs in the subregion, along with government officials, have participated in more than 25 human rights capacity-building activities throughout the reporting period, while more than 1,000 NGOs and 3,000 contacts have received information and outreach materials. The Centre's staff contributed to and supported about 50 activities led by government and/or civil society organizations.

41. The Centre developed close relationships with the International Organization of la Francophonie, with which it organized two press conferences in Gabon and a joint programme to train journalists on the use of the human rights-based approach to reporting in the Congo.

[2] Cameroon: fourth session of the Human Rights Council, 2-13 February 2009; Congo, Central African Republic and Chad: fifth session, 4-15 May 2009; Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea: sixth session, 30 November-11 December 2009.

42. The Centre strengthened its cooperation with the Government of Switzerland, with which it organized a day of consultation with NGO representatives from the Central African Republic and Chad on democratization processes, governance, conflict resolution and mediation between belligerents. The Centre has also greatly increased its bilateral partnerships, notably with the Netherlands and France, both of which fund Junior Professional Officer posts and actively support the Centre's programmes in the region, but also with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which has contributed both funds and human resources to its promotional and sensitization activities relating to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Centre has developed close relations with the European Union both in Cameroon and in the Congo, carrying out a joint project for a human rights journalism prize in Cameroon and a joint capacity-building programme for journalists in the Congo.

## C. Collaboration with United Nations agencies

43. The Centre has been working in close partnership with the United Nations country teams in the subregion and has enjoyed their substantial support in the implementation of its regional activities. In Cameroon, the Congo and Equatorial Guinea, the Centre has developed a close relationship with, and has now become a permanent part of the United Nations country teams, being regularly involved in and consulted on their planning, work and activities. In June 2008, the Centre participated in a strategic meeting of the United Nations country team in Equatorial Guinea, held in Morocco, where it was decided that the Centre would take part in a capacity-building programme on HIV/AIDS and human rights and on the rights of migrants. It was also agreed that the Centre would play an advisory role in the implementation of the UNDP-administered trust fund on human rights in Equatorial Guinea and that a joint mission of the Centre and United Nations country team members to Equatorial Guinea to meet the Government would be organized.

44. In Cameroon, the Centre is also part of the United Nations Communication Group, composed of the public information officers of United Nations agencies, which has developed a common communication strategy for United Nations work in the country.

45. The promotion of gender equality and the prevention of violence against women has been a common concern of United Nations agencies in Cameroon, and the Centre contributed to related activities. In November 2007, the Centre joined a United Nations country team meeting to discuss the guidelines on the collection of information for the drafting of a report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women for Cameroon, as well as the work schedule. The United Nations Development Fund for Women office in Cameroon coordinated the report, while agencies were asked to provide information based on the articles of the Convention relating to their work. The various activities related to the celebrations of International Women's Day, 8 March 2008, were prepared in a joint effort of United Nations agencies, in close cooperation with the Cameroonian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family. In this framework, journalists and NGO representatives were invited to a ceremony co-chaired by the Ministry, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the director of the Centre. During a press conference the attention of media professionals was drawn to the need to participate

in the fight against impunity for the rape of women and girls and the relevance of press reports on issues related to violence against women.

46. The United Nations Children's Fund, the International Labour Organization and the Centre joined in a common project to assess the situation of indigenous peoples in Cameroon and develop programmes to support its improvement. From 10 to 12 April 2008, the Centre took part in a workshop on the contributions of the Baka and Mbororo people, two marginalized/vulnerable groups, in the participative consultations held by the Cameroonian Government with a view to the elaboration of a new poverty reduction strategy paper. In June 2008, the three agencies carried out a joint mission to eastern and southern Cameroon in order to assess the living conditions of those groups. The team met with local administration officials, civil society, and the Baka and Mbororo communities and concluded that both groups suffer from discrimination and limited access to education, health care, water, sanitation and property.

47. In November 2007, the Centre actively participated in a meeting organized jointly by UNDP and the Cameroonian Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development in order to discuss poverty reduction efforts and to initiate a subsidy programme for 93 rural communities, with special attention to women and people affected or infected by HIV/AIDS.

48. The Centre furthermore regularly contributed to discussions related to the difficult humanitarian and human rights conditions in the far north of Cameroon, characterized by famine, drought, low standards of living and poor social services.

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

49. **The strategy undertaken by the Centre in 2006 is starting to bear fruit. The Centre has become very visible and is trusted by credible national and regional organizations to provide input, advice and expertise. Relationships with the Governments in the subregion have been enhanced and clear counterparts in the relevant ministries have been identified. The Centre receives many more requests for technical cooperation, training and legal advice than its capacity allows it to respond to, despite the increase in staff and financial resources. Compared to 2007, when the Centre received only one request for technical cooperation, in 2008 four Governments and one subregional network expressed interest in technical cooperation with the Centre. Furthermore, the Centre has advanced the implementation of the memorandum of understanding with ECCAS, in particular regarding child rights, peace and security and general human rights training.**

50. **The Centre will continue to increase its coordination with United Nations country teams to ensure that the human rights-based approach is a common aspect of all United Nations programming in the region, thus allowing better knowledge of and improved targeted actions towards the most vulnerable people. Moreover, the Centre will further develop its democracy and transitional justice programmes to achieve broader understanding of these issues and make them useful tools for the political peacebuilding processes and transitions currently happening in Central Africa. The Centre continues to broaden its impact on gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence through long-term capacity-building and outreach programmes.**

51. **Furthermore, the Centre will enhance its coordination with Governments and civil society organizations on the one hand and with regional and international partners on the other hand to achieve sustainable results and impact. Finally, the Centre will continue to advise Governments of the region and support their efforts to become fully open to human rights protection work and allow both the Centre and the United Nations special procedures to support their efforts in this field of work.**

52. **The Centre will take all the above into account when preparing its new strategy in 2009. In the short term, special focus will be put on building the capacity of indigenous peoples in relation to racism and discrimination; the training of security forces and prison administrations in Cameroon, the Congo and Gabon on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol; addressing human trafficking, including trafficking of children, in collaboration with ECCAS; supporting public sensitization campaigns on violence against women; and following up on capacity-building activities organized in 2008. The Centre will also continue its work in the field of peace and security and increase its support for the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. It will also continue its close technical advice to and support for national human rights institutions in the region, particularly in Cameroon, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.**